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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0479
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2373
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1757
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000199

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ SPEAKER VIEWS U.S. VISIT AS USEFUL, AGAIN
URGES GREATER OPENNESS ON BASE PAYMENTS

REF: A. STATE 17715

[1](#)B. BISHKEK 124

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Classified By: DCM Lee Litzenberger, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Charge met with Speaker of Parliament Marat Sultanov on February 14 to discuss the Speaker's recent visit to the United States (Ref A) and reported statements about renegotiating the Manas Airbase agreement; the status of the parliament's December resolution concerning the base; parliament's legislative agenda; and the Speaker's upcoming visit to Iran. Sultanov said that his visit to Washington had been useful, and he understands that the base remains necessary for operations in Afghanistan. He said that the lack of openness and detail regarding base payments and U.S. assistance hurt Kyrgyz perceptions of the U.S. Sultanov said that the parliament would be examining the arrangements for all foreign bases in Kyrgyzstan. Sultanov suggested that an official visit by President Bakiyev to Washington would help balance what Bakiyev hears in other capitals. Sultanov said that his trip to Iran was merely in response to the Iranian speaker's visit to Kyrgyzstan last fall. End Summary.

Productive U.S. Visit

[1](#)2. (C) Speaker of Parliament Marat Sultanov told the Charge that the meetings during his recent eight-day trip to the United States had been useful. In Washington, he had received informative briefings on the situation in Afghanistan, and he appreciated that the Manas Air Base remained necessary to support operations there. Sultanov suggested that it would be useful for other Kyrgyz officials

to receive similar briefings, and the Charge said that we would work to organize more briefings here at the base, or possibly in Afghanistan. Sultanov said that he would like to find a mechanism for the Kyrgyz parliament to work with the Afghan parliament, suggesting that the Kyrgyz experience with issues such as ethnic tensions would be useful to share with their Afghan counterparts.

Problems with Base Perceptions

13. (C) Sultanov said that while many understood the need for the continued presence of the base, there were problems with perceptions of the base, and the U.S. could do a better job of explaining the base (see Ref B). Sultanov said that the lack of transparency regarding payments for the base led to rumors and speculation about corruption. He said that the use of only the figure for total U.S. payments and assistance -- \$150 million -- raised many questions, and parliamentarians (and the public) wanted to know where the money and assistance was going. He said it was critical to explain the details. Sultanov also said that the U.S. should have adopted a more "humane" approach to December shooting of a local truck driver at the base; a timely (monetary) gesture to the widow would have helped improve perceptions.

Parliament to Look at All Bases

14. (C) Sultanov said that following on its December (non-binding) resolution demanding that the government renegotiate the Manas Air Base agreement, the parliament would be examining the arrangements for all foreign bases in Kyrgyzstan. (Note: in addition to the U.S. air base at Manas, there are two Russian bases in Kyrgyzstan. End Note.)

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Sultanov mentioned that, linked to the Russian presence at the Kant air base, Russia provides 60 to 70 scholarships to Kyrgyz to attend FSB and Ministry of Defense training in Russia; in addition, the Russian bases pay rents to local authorities and provide jobs for some local Kyrgyz residents.

An Invitation for Bakiyev?

15. (C) Sultanov recommended that we invite President Bakiyev to Washington for an official visit. Over the past 15 years, he said, there had been no "official" visits but only working visits to Washington. He said that Bakiyev travels to other countries -- Russia, Kazakhstan, European countries -- and a trip to Washington and meeting directly with U.S. officials would balance what he hears in other capitals. The Charge agreed that such a visit could be useful, but pointed out that there are several unresolved issues affecting the bilateral relationship that make the timing of such a visit difficult.

Parliament's Priorities

16. (C) Sultanov characterized the relations between the presidential administration and the parliament as "good," with general agreement on the work that needs to be done. Sultanov said that relations with new Prime Minister Isabekov were "not bad" following Isabekov's meetings with all the committee chairs in parliament. Sultanov said that parliament would initially work on the budget, with discussions over the next two weeks focusing on simplifying the regional and local government structure. Sultanov said he favored eliminating the oblast level; he said the prime minister also favored a two-tier budget, but thought a transition period would be needed to move from three to two levels. Parliament would next tackle economic projects, with discussion of the contentious issue of privatization in the electricity sector.

NDI's Work in Parliament

17. (C) Asked about assistance programs to the parliament, Sultanov said that the current programs, particularly NDI's but also the OSCE's, needed to take a broader view of who they worked with in parliament. Sultanov said that "all factions" in parliament needed to be represented on trips abroad and on other programs. He criticized the NDI program for concentrating on two opposition factions (the "Jibek Jolu" and "Elbirimdigi" groups), and not working with a wider spectrum. Thus, the presidential administration sees NDI as working only with the opposition. Sultanov also complained that NDI's top leadership did not find time to meet with him when he was in Washington.

Off to Iran

18. (C) Sultanov said that his upcoming March 9 visit to Iran was in response to the visit last fall of Iran's majlis speaker to Kyrgyzstan. Sultanov said that the Kyrgyz parliament maintained good relations with most other parliaments in the region, and he would also be making a similar visit to the parliament in Pakistan. Charge urged Sultanov to be cautious in any remarks that could be twisted by the Iranians to show support for their nuclear program. Sultanov said that it had been a precondition of the visit

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last fall not to raise the nuclear issue, and he emphasized that Kyrgyzstan wanted a minimum number of nuclear powers, and that any program should be open to inspection.

Comment

19. (C) Sultanov clearly is interested in ways to improve the bilateral relationship. He was upbeat about the results of his U.S. trip, both with the Washington meetings and his program in Utah. He is interested in the possibility of building a relationship between the Kyrgyz parliament and the state legislatures in Utah and Montana, with a focus on the common experiences of mountain states. Sultanov welcomed the news that Congress's Open World exchange program was expanding to Kyrgyzstan, and agreed that it would be useful to target parliamentarians for the program.

YOVANOVITCH